

Investigating the impact of FACEBOOK-speak on the written academic work of learners in a Western Cape high school

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of language typically used on social network sites such as Facebook (referred to here as “Facebook-speak”) on the written academic work of a selected group of high school learners. The general aims of the study were to determine the prevalence of access to Facebook and thus of exposure to Facebook-speak amongst high school learners, and to establish whether any evidence of Facebook-speak features are identified in the written academic work of these learners.

Eighty-eight learners from an English-Afrikaans dual medium school in a middle class region in the Western Cape participated in the study. The participants included 44 Afrikaans medium learners and 44 English medium learners of which 51 were in grade 8 and 37 were in grade 9. Questionnaires were completed by the learner participants to determine frequency and volume of Facebook use and self-reported recognition of features of Facebook-speak. Learners also completed a written exercise attached to the questionnaires for the purposes of discovering what counts as Facebook-speak features. The specific features the study anticipated were (deliberate) spelling errors, unconventional punctuation features, over-punctuation, the exclusion of functional words, the excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms and the incorporation of emoticons in written academic work. Additional features identified were the nonconventional use of tenses and sentence structure.

The study hypothesised that high exposure to Facebook-speak and limited exposure to formal academic writing have an effect on the academic work of the learners. I considered a claim that the effects of Facebook-speak would be traceable in the schoolwork of the learners. The study therefore compared the actual academic marks the learner participants achieved in one semester for two of their subjects, namely their First Additional Language and History, and related these marks to questionnaire data. I assumed that in the language subject there would be more attention to aspects of grammar and writing, so that the effects of Facebook-speak were more likely to be seen in their History – and also reflected in their marks, i.e. I assumed weak writing skills would be more evident in History than in a language subject, and that weaker writing correlates with poorer marks.

Five teacher participants from the same school also completed questionnaires regarding the visible features of Facebook-speak in the learners written work. They commented on new digital literacies and their impact on learners written academic work in an open-ended question put to them in the questionnaire.

The results of the study indicate that learner-participants are ardent users of the social utility Facebook and that socio- economic and racial variables do not factor significantly into Facebook accessibility. The learners believe that Facebook does not have any negative impact on their History work. The data I worked with pointed to the contrary. The History marks were in fact lower than the First Additional marks across both grades and all the classes. This could be attributed (at least in part) to a lack of dedicated attention to grammaticality and writing style in the History classroom and an emphasis on factual correctness instead. Although they did not believe Facebook-interaction translated into weaker marks, almost half of the learners stated that Facebook does indeed have an impact on their written work. In considering the possible relation between Facebook-speak and academic performance, the study found that the Afrikaans L1 learners achieved lower marks in both their First Additional language (their L2) and History in comparison to the English L1 learners using the same measures. This possibly indicates not only high exposure to Facebook-speak, but also limited exposure to standardised forms of Afrikaans as it is used in other genres.

The written exercise completed by the learners accounted for the majority of data that substantiated the hypothesis that Facebook-speak impacts the written academic work of learners at school. The Afrikaans medium learners scored weaker marks than the English medium participants. The overall non-formal language features were significantly more in the exercises written by Afrikaans medium learners.

The abundance of non-formal language features represented in the learner participants’ written work can be related to any of a number of variables. Negative perceptions among teachers and learners regarding multimodalities and digital literacies do not allow the development of curricula or learning materials which integrate such new literacies in the learning process. The reality that learners’ world

is one where digital communication and short messaging is likely to increase rather than disappear, obliges a search for effective ways of incorporating such real world uses of language into educational structures in a thorough and integrative way. Until tried and tested methods have been achieved, traditional literacies appear not to be developing, while the notion of new literacies is still on the backburner in South African schools.

Samevatting

Hierdie studie ondersoek die uitwerking van tipiese sosialenetwerk-taal soos die van Facebook (sogenaamde Facebook-*speak*) op die geskrewe akademiese werk van 'n uitgesoekte groep hoërskoolleerders. Die Algemene oogmerk van die studie was om die heersende toegang tot Facebook en dus die blootstelling aan Facebook-*speak* van die leerders te bepaal en om vas te stel of daar getuienis van kenmerkende Facebook- *speak* in die geskrewe akademiese werk van hierdie leerders is.

Agt-en-tagtig leerders van 'n Engels-Afrikaans dubbelmediumskool in 'n middelklas-omgewing in die Wes-Kaap het aan die studie deelgeneem. Die deelnemers het ingesluit 44 Afrikaansmedium-leerders en 44 Engelsmedium-leerders. Hiervan was 51 in graad 8 en 37 in graad 9. Die leerder-deelnemers het vraelyste voltooi om aan te toon wat die frekwensie en omvang van hul Facebook-gebruik was. Hulle eie herkenning van aspekte van Facebook-*speak* is ook getoets. 'n Geskrewe oefening is by die vraelys aangeheg sodat die leerders self kon aandui wat hulle as kenmerke van Facebook- *speak* beskou. Die spesifieke kenmerke wat die studie voorsien het, was (doelbewuste) spelfoute, onkonvensionele puntuasie, oorpuntuasie, die uitsluiting van funksionele woorde, die oormatige gebruik van afkortings en akronieme en die insluiting van ikone vir emosies (sg "*smileys*") in geskrewe akademiese werk. Bykomstige kenmerke wat geïdentifiseer is, was die onkonvensionele gebruik van grammatikale tydsaanduidings en sinstruktuur.

Die studie het veronderstel dat die hoë blootstelling aan Facebook- *speak* en die beperkte blootstelling aan formele akademiese skryfwerk 'n uitwerking op die akademiese werk van leerders sou hê. 'n Aanspraak dat die uitwerking van Facebook-spraak naspeurbaar in die skoolwerk van leerders sou wees, is ondersoek. Die studie het dus die werklike akademiese punte van die leerders in een semester in twee van hul vakke, naamlik Eerste Addisionele Taal, en Geskiedenis, in verband gebring met die vraelys-data. Die ondersoeker het veronderstel dat in die taalvak daar meer aandag aan aspekte van grammatika en skryfwerk gegee sou word, sodat die uitwerking van Facebook-*speak* in Geskiedenis meer waarskynlik merkbaar sou wees en dus ook uit hulle punte vir die onderskeie vakke sou blyk. Die veronderstelling was dat swak skryfvaardighede duideliker na vore sou kom in Geskiedenis as in 'n taalvak, en dat swakker taalvaardighede met laer punte sou korreleer.

Vyf onderwyser-deelnemers van dieselfde skool het ook 'n vraelys voltooi oor die sigbare kenmerke van Facebook- *speak* in die leerders se geskrewe werk. In 'n oopvraag-afdeling van die vraelys het hulle ook kommentaar gelever oor digitale geletterdheid en die impak daarvan op leerders se geskrewe akademiese werk.

Die studie laat blyk dat die leerder-deelnemers ywerige gebruikers van die Facebook-diens is en dat sosio-ekonomiese en rasse-veranderlikes geen beduidende rol speel in Facebook-toegang nie. Die leerders meen dat Facebook geen negatiewe uitwerking op hul Geskiedenis-werk het nie. Die data dui egter op die teendeel. Die Geskiedenis-punte was inderdaad laer as die Eerste Addisionele Taal-punte vir beide graad-groepe en al die klasse. Dit kan dalk deels toegeskryf word aan 'n gebrek aan doelgerigte aandag aan grammatikaliteit en skryfstyl in die Geskiedenis-klaskamers en 'n groter klem op feitelike korrektheid. Ofskoon die leerders gemeen het hulle Facebook-interaksie lei nie tot swakker punte nie, het byna die helfte van hulle beweer dat Facebook inderdaad 'n uitwerking op hulle geskrewe werk het. By die oorweging van die moontlike verhouding tussen Facebook-*speak* en akademiese prestasie, bevind die studie dat die Afrikaans L1-leerders laer punte gekry het in beide hul Eerste

Addisionele Taal (hulle L2) en Geskiedenis vergeleke met die Engels L1-leerders. Dit dui moontlik op 'n hoë blootstelling aan Facebook- *speak* onder die Afrikaanse leerders, maar ook beperkte blootstelling aan gestandaardiseerde vorme van Afrikaans soos dit voorkom in ander genres.

Die geskrewe oefening het die meeste data opgelewer ter ondersteuning van die hipotese dat Facebook- *speak* 'n uitwerking het op die geskrewe akademiese werk van skoolleerders. Die Afrikaansmedium-leerders het laer punte gekry as hulle Engelsmedium eweknieë. Die oorheersende nie-formele taalkenmerke was beduidend meer aanwesig in die oefeninge wat deur die Afrikaansmedium leerders geskryf is.

Die oormaat nie-formele taalkenmerke wat in die leerder-deelnemers se geskrewe werk voorkom kan met verskeie veranderlikes in verband gestel word. Negatiewe persepsies onder onderwysers en leerders rakends multimodaliteit en digitale geletterdheid laat waarskynlik nie toe vir ontwikkeling van kurrikula of leermateriaal wat aansluit by nuwe geletterdheidsvorme in die leerproses nie. Die werklikheid dat die leerder in 'n wêreld leef waar digitale kommunikasie en kortboodskap-flitse waarskynlik eerder gaan toeneem as gaan verdwyn, maak dit belangrik dat daar gesoek word na doeltreffende maniere waarop sulke gebruike van taal in die regte wêreld deeglik in die onderwysstrukture geïntegreer sal word. Terwyl beproefde en bewese metodes nog buite bereik is en tradisionele geletterdheid skynbaar nie ontwikkel nie, lyk dit asof die idee van nuwe geletterdhede in Suid-Afrikaanse skole nog net toekomsmusiek is.

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Chapter One

The Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

We find ourselves in a technological era where it has become inconceivable to live without the World Wide Web. The internet has become our main source of access to knowledge and an important instrument in social connections to friends and family. In education, having to write an assignment or do research in any field without the use of the internet is inconceivable. The world has become a global village which overcomes distance in time and space via the internet.

The incorporation of computers and specifically the internet into very many schools, colleges, universities and other tertiary education institutions has created a new social structure that co-determines the type of language and communication to which students are being exposed. The release of the social utility Facebook in 2004 on the World Wide Web has been taken to influence the way in which students conduct themselves on a daily basis (Westlake, 2008: 27)

Previous studies have shown that applications of the internet are pertinent in that they provide facilities for students to stay in contact with one another and to build their social connections (Kitsis, 2008: 31). Facebook, the social utility in focus in this study, has been noted to have both positive and negative effects on students regarding the development of identities and the self. Facebook has been identified as a new social platform that has the ability to affect student's academic reading and writing practices because of the increase in new digital literacies found in digital media and its influence on literary practices.

Many state schools have computer laboratories that not only use electronic facilities in learning, but also provide internet access to the learners. The internet is accessible to many learners in their homes and even through mobile cellular phones. Accordingly, electronic social media such as Facebook are accessible as well.

1.2 The Research Aims

The aim of the study is to determine whether or not Facebook-speak (written language used during communication on Facebook) has any remarkable impact on the written academic work of a group of high school learners. Specifically, it will investigate the effect of this Social Network Site (SNS) on the academic written language of the selected learners. It will focus specifically on the effect of Facebook-speak on written work of learners in a dual medium secondary school in their second language (L2) as well as in a non-language subject, namely History. Four groups of learners, two in Afrikaans medium and two in English medium classes provided the data for this study.

1.3 The Research Questions

The questions to be addressed in this research project are interested in the extent to which Facebook use has an impact on learners' academic development, linguistic development, their socialisation skills and related aspects of their lives. Extensive exposure to any type of literacy is likely to have an effect on language use of learners at primary and high school level. This study will investigate the possible effect new literacies, originating from electronic social media, may have on academic writing at secondary school level.

The recent surge in electronic social utilities has reached the life world of young adolescents in a dramatic way over the past few years.

The incorporation of computers in the teaching and learning programmes of many South African high schools has made it easy for learners to access social utilities such as Facebook.

The widespread use of social media by learners of different age groups, races and language proficiencies makes for an interesting investigation into the possible effect these types of media have on learners.

The study concentrates on the sociolect of young teenagers, considering work they produce in their L2 as a subject and in History. My interest is in (i) what traces of Facebook-speak are to be found in their work, (ii) what perceptions learners and teachers have of possible effects of Facebook-speak on written schoolwork, and (iii) whether there is any observable connection between the effects of Facebook-speak and the academic achievement of the learners in the selected two subjects. Thus, my interest is in whether Facebook has contributed to the development of a sociolect among young learners that has a regular set of grammatical and communicative features.

A sociolect is defined as “a variety of language (dialect) used by people belonging to a particular social class. The speakers of a sociolect usually share a similar socio-economic and/or educational background” (Longman’s Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2010:537).

The main question to be addressed in this study is:

How are new literacies associated with electronic social media (such as Facebook) reflected in the academic written work of learners at secondary school level?

In order to answer this question a number of related sub-questions have to be addressed. The effect of Facebook-speak as a new literacy practice in communication needs to be addressed as a phenomenon. Facebook-speak, for the purposes of this study, is regarded as a developing written register with a set of grammatical and typological features associated with digital literacies, such as deliberately incorrect spelling, lack of punctuation, excessive use of abbreviations, and so on. These features have developed in response to limited text space

(longer messages are more costly and less easy to access on the available hardware), and to a need for fast reaction time in digital communication. Other existing forms of digital literacy that have developed in new social media and that can be regarded as new literacies are SMSs, emails, on-line chat rooms and instant messaging services. The features of these new literacies have been recognised in learners' formal written work, even in handwritten texts using old-style pen and paper, where concise wording, shortened sentences and paragraphs are not necessarily required. These features have been identified and associated with Facebook-speak because of the particular characteristics typically found in short-messaging and on sites such as Facebook or Twitter Davies (2012: 21). The perceptions of acceptability (or not) regarding new literacies and a possible implementation of this type of text in secondary schools among teachers and learners, will be determined.

Sub-questions I shall address in my endeavour to answer the main question in this research are:

- What are the perceptions of learners as well as educators on the use of linguistic forms typically associated in FACEBOOK-speak?
- Is there any kind of correlation between Facebook use and achieved results in academic work in two school subjects?
- If an effect is perceived, is it regarded as being negative or positive?
- Are there indicators that specific language groups are affected more by Facebook use than other language groups?

The majority of learners, regardless of which L1 they have, experience and spend a substantial amount of time on the social utility known as Facebook. Accordingly, one can assume that language features found on Facebook will be present in learners' academic written work.

1.4 Hypotheses

The study will work with the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Transferral of Facebook-speak to learners' written work is more likely to occur in the context of the History classroom than in the L2-language classroom¹ because in the latter special attention is likely to be given to language conventions in writing. Thus the premise is that less attention goes to formal language use than to factual correctness in the History classroom.

Hypothesis 2: Learners perceptions regarding their own language proficiency and actual written language skills will be skewed. Facebook-speak will have a larger effect on their written academic work than they think.

Hypothesis 3: The extent of Facebook-speak transferral to learners' written academic work will present more in Afrikaans medium learners' work than in that of English medium learners. This theory stems from the impression that Facebook-speak features have developed predominantly in English and that therefore Afrikaans medium learners are exposed to less of their mother tongue than before.

Hypothesis 4: Specific features of Facebook-speak will be found in learners written academic work. As the L2 is typically the weaker of s learner's languages, the effects are more likely to be evidenced in the L2 written work than in the L1 as a subject.

1.5 The Research Data and Research Instruments

Data was gathered from one Afrikaans/English parallel medium secondary school in the Overberg region. The school has 809 learners from grades 8 to grade 12. The gender division at this school is currently 455 females to 354 males. Bilingually, the school's student body is slightly more Afrikaans L1 than English L1. Respondents from the school consist of two Grade 8 and two

¹ For learners in the Afrikaans medium groups, the L2 subject is English; for learners in the English medium groups, the L2 subject is Afrikaans.

Grade 9 classes, specifically considering their work in the L2 language class and in History classes. Data was collected by means of questionnaires completed by learners from two Afrikaans Second Language (L2) classes, two English Second Language (L2) classes and by means of a second questionnaire completed by five teachers. History classes and the teachers in this subject were selected because with less emphasis on grammatical issues in written academic work in this subject, learners are expected to be less guarded against using forms that the curriculum disallows. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher himself. Data obtained has been anonymised so that the identities of all participants are protected throughout. The first questionnaire to be administered to the learners (see attachment A) consisted of 7 items focusing on specific information regarding Facebook usage. The second section of these questionnaires contained items regarding learners' language proficiencies.

The questionnaires administered to teachers regarding learners' language use (see attachment B) focussed on whether or not these educators notice any specific practices in written work that does not fit the set language standards and that can be attributed to Facebook-speak. Finally, access to learners academic results was obtained; these results were used for the control they could provide in assessing the accumulated data. More specific details of the various research instruments, how each was used and how clearance to access the various sources was obtained, will be given in chapter four. This study is interested not only whether Facebook-speak has an effect on learners' written work, but also whether learners can (and need to) distinguish between different genres used in different contexts. Their awareness of what is typically suitable in an informal socially orientated communicative setting and that of formal academic work is to be assessed.

The results of the study should eventually be helpful in identifying which new literacies found in and developed by electronic social media, are useful (or detrimental) to the development of registers required in academic discourse. The possibility of effectively integrating these everyday new literacy experiences of learners into academic writing at schools, need some scholarly reflection.

Chapter Two

Computer Mediated Communication and the Language Revolution

2.1 The Technological Uprising

“The year 2000 marked the end of a decade of linguistic revolution. The new century must deal with its consequences” (Crystal, 2004: 1). In the 15th-century the printing revolution altered and reshaped the way in which people communicated with one another. It brought with it developments in society such as scientific discovery, Renaissance thinking and the rise of Protestantism (Ross, 2006: 39). In the same way as written language broke away from the spoken form during the print revolution, so too a new written revolution is becoming evident in the information age.

The source for the current transformation in written language stems from the use of the Internet and has caused the increase in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).

Although the Internet has been around since the 1960’s, the World Wide Web was only established in 1991 (Crystal, 2004: 64). The Internet was initially a created network intended for the transfer of e-mails and chats between elite persons, thirty years later however it has become the ultimate source for information exchange worldwide.

As computers became more affordable and accessible to people an increase in exposure to the Internet became apparent. The Internet was regarded as being no more “than an association of computer networks with common standards which enable messages to be sent from any central computer (or host) on one network to any host on any other” (Crystal, 2004: 66). By the year 2000 however, the Internet was the largest computer network with over 100 million

hosts making available many different services and allowing for people to stay in touch by means of assorted techniques.

The Internet can be identified by three broad functions namely, the *World Wide Web (Web)*, *Electronic mail (e-mail)*, and *Chatgroups* (Crystal, 2004: 66-67).

The *Web* is a culmination of all the computers linked to the Internet which maintain documents and make them mutually accessible by means of “the HyperText Transfer Protocol, or HTTP”. *E-mails* the transfer of electronic messages between computer systems but primarily sent between private mail boxes. *Chatgroups* are “rooms” in which specific continuous topics are discussed by interested Internet users (Crystal, 2004: 66).

Computer mediated communication (CMC) has essentially existed since the first exchanged prototype emails in the 1960's. CMC has only relatively recently become a field of interest to scholars in the sense of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). John December defines CMC as, “Computer Mediated Communication is a process of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, engaging in process to shape media for a variety of purposes” (Thurlow et al, 2004: 15).

The most commonly used term for language on the Internet is *netspeak*. This term helps distinguish between language and discourse as methods of communication in cyberspace. Sociolinguists are concerned with the type of discourse as has been ever more present in ‘netspeak’. Netspeak encompasses not only how language on the Internet looks like but also how people use it differently (Thurlow et al, 2004: 120). As is found in real world face-to-face communication, netspeak also has what is known as speech communities. These speech communities allow people to organise themselves into specifically desired communities on through netspeak. “Netspeak is a development of millennial significance. A new medium of linguistic communication does not arrive very often, in the history of the race” (Crystal,

2001: 238-239). This language form is regarded by some scholars as being so important that it has been considered the ‘fourth medium’ of language after writing, speaking and signing (Thurlow et al, 2004: 123).

Language and discourse have constantly been changing and are dependent on social variables which ultimately shape online communication. The contextual variables shaping this form of interaction are the channel being used (e.g. email), the participants (teenagers or work colleagues) and the topic and purpose (love letter or business card) (Thurlow, 2004: 126).

The format of communication via these modern technologies is known as ‘new literacies.’ In present day society it is no longer adequate to merely read and write in print format.

Literacies are regarded as being more complex and unrestrained than ever before.

Accordingly, “New literacies” refers to the unique ways of reading and writing with the new technologies of information, communication and multimedia...As well as technical and intellectual competencies, new literacies include social abilities necessary for living in today’s diverse and multicultural world” (Asselin, 2004: 52).

The different technological platforms that contain new forms of literacy to name a few are *netspeak, e-mail, Chatgroups, virtual worlds* and the *web*. These computer-mediated varieties of language bring with them different sets of linguistic challenges and combined are the origins for the inception of new literacies.

‘New literacies’ are also Multimodal in nature. Multimodality refers to the different modes which are present in most new technological forms of communication and are combined to create meaning making interactions. These include colours, images, movement, sound, music speech and writing (Jewitt, 2006: 3). Multimodal literacies transcend the printed form because of the abundance of semiotic resources available to it at one point in time. Easily accessible technological media devices contain multimodal features that constantly evolve

and create new “schema for participation” and meaning making opportunities (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 227).

Another linguistic aspect that has been identified in CMC and is often interconnected with the above mentioned theories is genre theory. An increase in research has also been evident in genre theory due to the new found focus on digital media, specifically the Internet. Genre theory has traditionally focused on genres that have been transmitted through speech and print. Emphasis is now being placed more on genres present on the Internet. The generally accepted extensive and accurate definition of the concept genre is still that of Swales (1990):

A genre comprises a class of communicative event, the members of which share some set of communicative purpose. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style (Swales, 1990: 58).

2.2 The Inception of Facebook

Facebook.com was launched in February of 2004, by Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg. The social utility was originally meant as an online network for on campus Harvard students to be able to get to know one another. In 2006 however Zuckerberg opened Facebook up to everyone even though most users remain confined to certain, often local networks (Westlake, 2008: 24). Facebook has become one of the fastest spreading forms of entertainment not only in the United States but also worldwide. Since the inception of Facebook it has exponentially grown to include every college and university in the U.S. as well as academic institutions around the world. It also boasts networks in high schools, several companies, military bases and geographically based networks found globally (Westlake, 2008: 24).

The Internet has already altered the way in which people read text as has been highlighted in previous studies. This is because reading strategies are not linear on the web. Internet users are encouraged to choose a specific path or alter the order of the text as is motivated by their own desires and “cognitive processing style” (Westlake, 2008: 25).

More important than reading strategies is that of a written text created by the web. Roland Barthes in the 1970’s wrote about modernist printed literature and stated that “writerly” text is:

A perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduced the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages (Westlake, 2008: 26).

This definition not being directed at the Internet was however successfully applied to the writerly text of the web by George P. Landow (1997) in that the web lends itself to a certain participatory way of reading that are much more effective than the traditionally isolated page turning of the physical book (Westlake, 2008: 26).

This allowance for text alteration by amending and editing specific content as is the nature of Internet writing also carries over into social utilities such as Facebook. “Generation Y” as the media dubbed youths that use Facebook regard it as a means to communicating with friends and family through a forum that provides, “immediate and asynchronous social interaction, creating a collaborative, interactive, and performative text” (Westlake, 2008: 27).

It is argued that new literacies cannot merely be the use of new technologies that indicate a more polished performance of old practices. It needs to contain ‘new technical stuff’ as well as “new ethos stuff” (Davies, 2012: 21). Therefore the focus should be on social effects to define new literacy practices. This new “in kind” indicates a new “mind-set” and refers to an emerging ethos that regards new literacy practices as being more collaborative, multimodal,

participative and distributive which allows for less individualised, author-centred practices. New literacies thus combine “digitally with new social acts” (Davies, 2012: 21).

Regarding Facebook, the aforementioned describes how these texts in this social utility are constantly being re-made, extended, annotated and amended. The publication of text is immediate and is not restricted by geographical spaces and time. In (Davies 2012: 21), Luke argues that, “texts of the new technologies have mutated into complex hybrid systems that have made new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange, and communication.” These digitally multimodal textual practices have attracted a great deal of attention. Facebook is no exception in that successful use of this social network site (SNS) requires a multimodal approach of embedding and combining content and written texts from numerous sights.

2.3 Digital Literacies as New Pedagogies at School Level

The new literacies found in the 21st century can no longer be pushed aside and be made a later generations challenge. Interactive-screen based media should not be allowed to take a back seat in the classroom. “Linear, alphabetic writing is no longer the primary carrier of literate meaning” (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 227). New literacies are the new frontier for second language instruction (L2) where merely the old basics do not fit. It is argued that, “assumptions about learners, language form and format, text types, and social discourses must all be re-examined” (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 227).

New literature found in digital spaces allows for engagement in the interactive, multimodal genres and accordingly participation in dynamic, multidimensional communication. The new possibilities “reshape how we understand, teach, and test language and literacy in the classroom (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 228).

Reducing or continuing L2 education to the flat literacies of only paper based resources within the context of the classroom questions authenticity in L2 learning. If educators are to realistically engage L2 learners in communication as it occurs in the real world, brave new dimensions of literacy need to be incorporated in the classroom (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 228).

At the core of these literacies found in the new media contexts is the aspect of collaborative authorship. Individuals have simultaneously become “creator and consumer of mediated communication” (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 229). The digitally connected knowledge and collaborative authorship is the new breed of basic literary practices that need to be accommodated by educational infrastructures. Educators of specifically L2 learners need to come to the realisation that single authorship is merely another option and not a model for writing and that teaching extends beyond the confines of a classroom to digital resources and learning partners (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 229).

Besides reflecting on computer mediated interaction as a new mode of communication, this study also reflects on how adolescent learners relate to the social media, how their literacies are shaped and reflected by specifically Facebook interaction, and how these literacy practices shape and reflect their identities. The following sections provide references to theoretical work on these topics.

2.4 Social Media and Language Variation

Sociolinguistics is defined as “the study of the relationship between language and society” (Parker, 1986: 121). This field of study provides the broad theoretical framework for the current study in that its focus is on a specific group of people in the South African society namely, Facebook-using adolescents. The precise focus of this study is social media defined as, “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to

share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.” Social media is also defined as being a “dialogue” and “means [of] engaging with people” Coons, 2012: 44). In the context of this research it emphasises the alterations in written communication brought about by transformation in electronic media communication regarding the effects of social media on literacy practices in schools.

The language variety being studied is the sociolect used by the youths whilst on the social utility Facebook. The aim of the study is to determine whether it impacts their written academic work at school.

A study of language variation is defined as, “the study of those features of a language that differ systematically as we compare different groups of speakers or the same speaker in different situations” (Parker 1986: 113). Language variation is concerned with regional varieties of the same language such as comparisons of English used by natives from different regions. Social varieties are also a focus point, for instance the different styles of English used by say upper and lower working class people. Lastly and most importantly in terms of the given study, a study of language variation is interested in the stylistic varieties of the same language as used by individuals, for example the stylistic differences that would be used in a formal setting to those used in a more casual setting. Stylistic variations were closely examined in the study in order to compare the same English language use by adolescents during informal Facebook practices, and that of language use during formal written academic work.

2.5 English Second Language Learners and Identity Formation

This section will point out the links between literacy, second language literacy and identity. Second language literacy research has predominantly focused on cognitive and linguistic features regarding reading and writing for second language persons. Reading and writing for

L2 learners has mainly been studied from a psycholinguistic perspective to reveal the mental procedures present in the approaches used by L2 learners regarding written texts. New literary studies have furthered the research by emphasising the contextual nature of reading and writing, and how literacy is inseparable from “particular sociocultural contexts, institutions and social relationships” (Eva Lam, 2000: 458). Literacy in itself is therefore strongly influenced by “prevailing beliefs, practices and social relationships” which are found in specific institutional settings or sociocultural groups (Eva Lam, 2000: 459). Literacy learning is defined as, “a process by which the individual is socialised for group membership in specific literate communities and, in turn, participates in shaping the social practices of these communities” (Eva Lam, 2000: 459). Language user’s identities are significant in that participation in any form of literacy requires the user to adopt a social role and be a member of a specific group.

Identity formation is inherently complex in that membership to numerous social groups often creates conflicting, complimentary or contradictory relationships in the discourse communities that individuals belong to. It is argued that in the context of contradiction, identities are constructed by learners through selective seizure of literary resources (Eva Lam, 2000: 459).

Identity formation by L2 learners was incorporated into the study in that access to Facebook use involves exposure to all types of discourse communities that contradict, compliment or see conflict between one another. In this context, exposure to the variety of communities allows for the influence and formation of identities through the numerous literary resources.

2.6 Multimodalities in Computer Mediated Communication

Jewitt (2006: 18) states that “multimodality offers an approach that can be applied to the prominent role of visual and other ‘non-linguistic’ semiotic resources on the computer screen... semiotic resources of image, colour, animated movement, writing, sound-effect, speech and so on.” A multimodal approach to technology-mediated learning therefore allows a way of “thinking about

relationships between semiotic resources and people's meaning making" (Jewitt 2006: 18). The increase in new literacies found in CMC is rewriting the way in which we approach reading and writing and consequently the way we make meaning. Accordingly information about these phenomena needs to be addressed and incorporated into schools through new educational techniques.

The study attempts to determine if exposure to social CMC can influence formal writing at schools. Facebook is multimodal in nature and as such forms part of the theoretical background of the study.

2.7 New Literacies in Educational Spheres

New Literacies are defined as "evolving social practices that coalesce new digital tools along with the old symbolic tools to achieve key motivating purposes for engagement in the literary practices" (Swenson et al, 2006:353). The new technologies do not merely alter the way people live their lives but also the effect the way we think. With regards to education at schools it is imperative that attention is given to the effect of new literacies on learners because it constructs a specific way of thinking and approach to language which is no longer linear. Literate meaning is now also derived from these types of technologies and should be considered when formulating new curriculums.

Exposure to new literacies found in new technologies undoubtedly impact the way in which L2 learners perceive the world. The amount of contact alone with these social utilities certainly influences literary practices by learners. Depending on the specific community L2 learners are addressing on Facebook, their literary practices deviate from formal to informal. This study attempts to discover not only whether or not L2 learners can distinguish between the desired uses of formal or informal English written language as is required, but if exposure to social utilities such as Facebook affects the way in which they think and therefore approach literary practices in the context of the classroom.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

To determine the impact Facebook-speak has on second language high school learners written work, it was decided to investigate (1) the frequency of Facebook use, (2) learners language proficiency, (3) teachers approach to language policy and (4) asses an exercise given to the learners for features of Facebook-speak. The collected data would then be used to test the general hypothesis that frequent exposure to Facebook-speak correlates with Facebook features found in second language learners written academic work.

3.2 General Procedure

A headmaster from a high school in the Overberg region in the Western Cape was contacted for permission to conduct the study at their school. The school is a state managed secondary school. The Western Cape Department of Education was then contacted to obtain permission to enter the school and collect data as required from the teachers and learners. Authority was given on the condition that the data would be collected during the third term so as not to disrupt end of year examinations.

Once permission had been granted from the specific institution for the research proposal a set of questionnaires developed to obtain the relevant data, was used to elicit data in both contexts. The headmaster made specific classes available for the research to take place in. Two grade 8 and 9 history subject classes were made available from the schools. Four classes from the school were thus made available, two L2 class from each grade. The decision to use History lessons for the data collection was a considered one: this was not an exercise taken in

a language classroom where special requirements as to norms of language use are enforced. Thus the study has an interest in the way language structures of the social media are transferred to the language-of-learning as an instrument of learning a non-linguistic subject.

Prior to the data collection the selected teachers and I informed the learners as to the reason for the research and why they were selected. Learners were asked not to communicate with one another whilst completing the questionnaires. All participants took part voluntarily. They were reassured of their anonymity regarding the results of the study. Parents of the learners were given consent forms with information regarding the nature of the study. These forms were taken home by the learners and had to be brought back signed in order to comply with all the ethical regulations involved in the data collection process. The participating learners from the school were given 35 minutes to complete the questionnaires and the written exercise. During that time teachers also completed their questionnaires regarding their experience and perspectives on learners' language use and language policy as they found this to be enacted in the History classroom.

The participating teachers were asked to obtain the marks learners achieved for academic performance in their First Additional language class. This was done in order to check the learners academic achievement marks against their proposed, self-assessed language proficiency as it was found in the questionnaires. Discrepancies between learners' own evaluation of their linguistic abilities and the marks they obtained were then noted in interpreting the data.

The teachers of the selected History lesson classes also received questionnaires regarding language use by learners. The questionnaires were constructed to determine among other things, how strictly prescriptive language rules are enforced in the History classroom, whether or not features of Facebook-speak are evident in learners written work and whether

new literacies should be incorporated into main stream language teaching. This questionnaire also highlighted what the teachers thought about new technologies and their influence on language practices in schools.

3.3 Participant Selection

As has already been mentioned, the headmaster of the school was approached and asked whether four History classes of grade 8 and 9 learners could be made available to conduct research. The schools four classes were selected for data accumulation, two L2 History classes out of each grade. Two classes from each grade were selected from the school in order to draw as balanced a sample as possible to allow for accurate comparisons between language groups. Thus the study investigated not only whether social media have different effects on L2 learners in similar contexts, but also whether these media have different effects on different language groups. A total of 88 learners were made available by the said school. A period was given to administer and gather all the questionnaires as they were completed by the learners and teachers within the allotted 35 minute time frame. The language teachers in this time also obtained and made available the academic achievement marks of the learners participating in the study.

The teachers approached to complete the questionnaires were those of relevant subjects to the study at hand, namely the History subject teachers and the English-as-a-subject teachers. Besides the learners, these teachers formed a second set of participants.

3.4 Participant Characteristics

The student participants ranged between ages 12 and 15 across grade 8 and grade 9. These learners were selected to participate on the basis of their L2 language status.

The learner participants were all bilingual in English and Afrikaans to varying degrees. Particularly it was clear that there are varying levels of proficiency among L2 learners in

these grades - certain individuals being more fluent in their L2 language than others. The learners have all been exposed to second language acquisition in school as this is compulsory in schools under the auspices of the Department of Education in South Africa. Learners taking History were selected on the assumption that written work in the History classrooms is usually less stringent regarding grammaticality in long questions. More emphasis is placed on correct factual content. For this reason learners are likely to be more creative and less controlled in their English written work in the History classroom than in their written work in the English classroom. Thus in History learners may revert to more informal language use, and accordingly feel less inhibited in using Facebook features in their written work.

The extent to which L2 acquisition is affected would inevitably be varied among individuals. Distinct differences among learners will be marked because of a number of different elements that learners have been exposed to. Second Language acquisition is defined as, “the subconscious or conscious process by which a language other than the mother tongue is learned in a natural or tutored setting” (Ellis, 1985: 6). A distinction between acquisition and learning was not made during this study in that the focus is not on conscious grammatical or pragmatic elements or on subconscious communicative skills. Acquisition and learning are, in terms of this study, dealt with as the same concept. Due to the student bodies’ language composition (almost equally divided into L2 speakers of Afrikaans and English), exposure to both languages within the context of the school should be mostly equal. External features that stimulate L2 language acquisition of learners outside the context of the school are not taken into account as this would diminish the focus and would expand the research parameters beyond the scope of the study.

The teacher participants in the study consisted of only History L2 educators as well as Language teachers of L2 classes. The History teachers were selected because the learner participants all had History as a subject. The language teachers were selected for their

linguistic insights into teaching languages at school and their exposure to linguistic elements in learners work on a daily basis.

3.5 Questionnaires

The questionnaire (Appendix: A) administered to the learners consisted of 7 questions regarding Facebook use. The first questions ask whether or not the student has access to Facebook, to determine how easily the social utility was accessible to learners. The second two questions focused on how much time was spent on Facebook. The first asked for how many years the learner had been using Facebook and secondly, how much time he/she spent on Facebook during a normal school week. The amount of exposure regarding years using Facebook could indicate how long Facebook has been influencing their linguistic practices. The amount of time spent on Facebook weekly is indicative of the intensity of exposure by a learner during a school week.

Question three asks where Facebook is most often used by learners. The purpose of this question is to establish where access is readily available for learners to make use of this utility. The given options were library, home, school, cellular phone or other. This question establishes the numbers of places learners are able to access Facebook whether it be easily accessible or whether it is a challenge to use this technology.

The next question asks whether learners think Facebook use affects their obtained academic marks at school for the subject of History. The reasoning behind this question is that I wanted to determine whether there is an awareness of how Facebook can interact with knowledge production, as well as to obtain an idea as to the perception learners have regarding Facebook use and their writing skills. This question could be used later to draw a parallel between their perceptions and their actual achieved academic marks.

The following questions regarding Facebook use refer to the used language when writing either on Facebook or at school. The first question asks the learners whether they use a different form of language when they write on Facebook than when they write at school. This is to determine whether learners consciously shift from informal to formal language when writing in different contexts. The last item on the questionnaire asks whether learners think the way in which they write on Facebook influences the way they write in an academic situation such as in school. This question was constructed to determine whether learners are consciously aware of the different forms of writing and whether they realise that Facebook writing conventions may, consciously or unconsciously, be transferred into all written work.

The subsequent question attempted to highlight specific features of Facebook language that could be associated directly with the social utility. Learners were given a list of grammatical occurrences that are regularly seen on Facebook, and were asked to mark all the ones that they themselves use when writing on Facebook. These are spelling mistakes, punctuation inaccuracies, excessive use of particular punctuation marks, dismissal of functional words, and the excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms. This was done to determine whether these occurrences feature in both the Facebook use and academic written work of students. Their answers here would later be compared to what they did in the written exercise given to them as part of the data collection.

The last item on the questionnaire is an open-ended question asking students to, in no more than 50 words, write a letter to a friend regarding the Olympic Games they attended. This question was conceived in order to gain an impression of the learner's language proficiencies. It was limited to fifty words so that learners were obliged to summarise their ideas. This was implemented so that learners were forced to revert to concise language use which is so popular and typical of Facebook use. Such a word-count restriction could lead to inconsistencies in correct grammar use during formal written work.

The questionnaires received by the History teachers consisted of seven items and focused on literacy practices in the classroom. The first question asked whether teachers make learners aware of the set language requirements for written work. This is to have evidence of whether or not learners are aware of grammatical boundaries. This could be instructive if it appears that explicit instructions are given and we still find specific literacy inconsistencies in their formal written work.

The second item asks whether grammatical rules are enforced strictly in the context of the History class work. This was added as an item in that it could validate the hypothesis that language rules are less stringently enforced in the History classroom, which would allow for more creative writing on the part of the learner and therefore lend itself to more Facebook features appearing in written work than otherwise.

The final four items on the questionnaire all concern the prevalence of linguistic Facebook features potentially arising in learners work and whether teachers find this phenomenon to be on the increase. The final question asked whether teachers think that new literacies associated with social utilities should be incorporated or integrated into written academic work at schools. These items were all incorporated to clarify the existence of the studied phenomena and to discover what teacher's attitudes are towards what appears to be a strong current linguistic trend.

3.6 Data Analysis

The accumulated data obtained from the learners was converted into numerical figures which were tabulated using Microsoft excel. The learners questionnaires where incorporated into graphs and charts in order to accurately and methodically display the findings in a simplified manner. All the data was divided up into the three main categories of grade, class and language group. The data was converted into graphs, charts and tables to simply represent learners responses in the form of percentages where required.

The first section of the questionnaire consists of aspects regarding Facebook use whereas the second section concentrates on learners language proficiency. The opening table represents the years of experience on Facebook and the amount of time spent on this utility during a normal week. The following graph indicates the places where learners most regularly make use of or have access to Facebook. A chart represents the next data set by displaying the learners opinions on whether Facebook affects their obtained History marks. The final two tables attempts to establish whether or not the learners think Facebook use influences their written academic work at school.

The second section of the questionnaire is made up of four questions that focus on learners perceptions of their obtained academic marks which will be compared to actual academic marks as was obtained by the relevant educators. The last question asked learners to indicate which informal language features they make use of whilst using Facebook. These answers where related to features found in their written exercises as was completed by the participants.

The written samples were marked and examined for features of Facebook-speak as was highlighted in the last question of the learners questionnaires. These samples were compared with one another to draw an accurate picture between that of the learners perceptions regarding written Facebook features and the actual occurrence of these features in the exercises. The language features in the written exercises were calculated and tabulated into categories namely age, class and language group. These groups were then compared to each other to emphasise any inconsistencies found.

The teachers questionnaire data was also calculated and depicted in tables and graphs. Basic aspects of the teachers taught grades, subjects and learner totals were tabulated. There after questions regarding language policy and the implementation thereof was addressed by the teachers. The educators also gave very insightful comments regarding the items in the questionnaires concerning Facebook use and related grammatical features found in learners written work.

Chapter Four

Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.1 Analysis and discussion of the learner's questionnaires

4.1.1 Frequency of Facebook use

Experiment one (Chapter 1) was conceived to test the frequency with which learners use Facebook. Frequency will be used as an indicator of how experienced a user is. Learners were thus asked to indicate firstly the number of years they had been using Facebook and secondly, the amount of time they spent on this social utility during a normal weekday. Out of the 88 participants that completed the questionnaires 80 learners reported having experience and making use of Facebook on a daily basis. Therefore 91% of the learners in my sample are exposed to this social utility not only on a daily basis but in most cases for a number of years as well.

Table 1 (given below) depicts the percentage of learners, in both the grade 8 and 9 classes according to the years of experience they had had with Facebook and the volume in terms of time spent using it on a daily basis. With regards to years of experience using Facebook, the grade 9 classes trump the grade 8 classes. The majority of the learners indicated having had between 0 and 3 years experience, followed by singular cases with 4-5 and 6 or more years experience. The fact that the grade 8 learners in total have less experience than grade 9s in the 0-3 years range is because they have been exposed to Facebook for a shorter period of time due to being younger than the grade 9 learners. The table indicates that the grade 9 classes have been exposed to Facebook for longer; they selected the 4-5 years of exposure brackets substantially more than the grade 8 classes did. These findings can in all likelihood be attributed to age differences.

Table 1: Frequency and time spent on Facebook

Years of Facebook Experience	Grade 8				Grade 9				Totals
	A(A)		F(A,E,X)*		A(A)		F(E,X)		
Number/Percentage	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
0-1	11	48%	14	50%	6	38%	8	38%	39
2-3	10	43%	10	36%	6	38%	7	33%	33
4-5	1	4%	1	4%	3	19%	6	29%	11
6 or More	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1
No Response	0	0%	3	11%	1	6%	0	0%	4
Learner numbers	23		28		16		21		88

	Time spend on Facebook during a normal weekday (Monday- Friday)?								
	Grade 8				Grade 9				Totals
	A(A)		F(A,E,X)		A(A)		F(E,X)		
0-30 min	13	57%	12	43%	9	56%	12	57%	46
30min- 1hour	7	30%	6	21%	5	31%	4	19%	22
1-2 hours	2	9%	5	18%	1	6%	2	10%	10
2-3 hours	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	14%	3
3-4 hours	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1
4-5 hours	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	1
More than 10 hours a day	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	1
No Response	0	0%	3	11%	1	6%	0	0%	4
Total	23	1	28	1	16	1	21	1	88

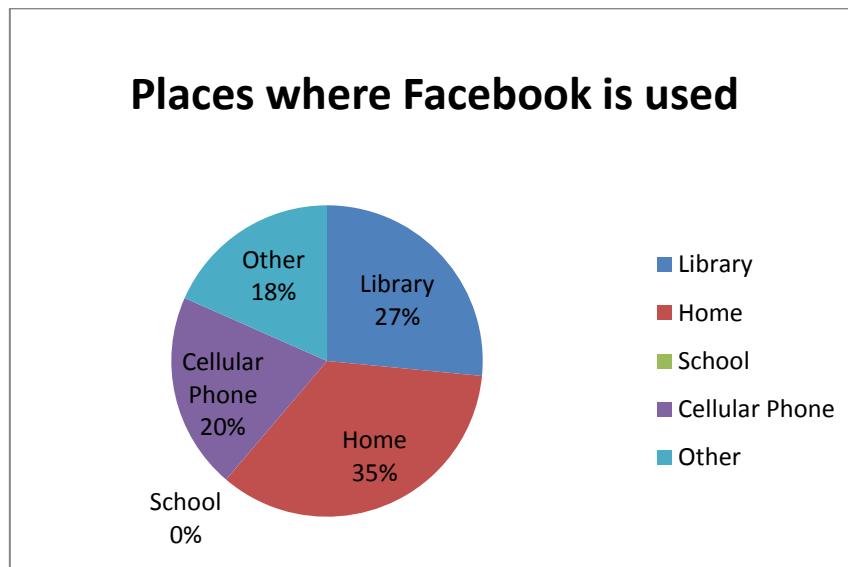
*Note, the letters (A, E, X) indicate the learners home language and therefore the class language composition. A=Afrikaans, E=English and X=Xhosa.

Table 1 further indicates that the majority of grade 8 and 9 learners (43%-57%) use Facebook between 0-30 minutes a day and between (19%-30%) use Facebook between 30min- 1hour a day. Also (6%-18%) make use of the social utility between 1-2 hours a day. The majority of learner's 53% make use of Facebook at least 30 min a day, whereas the rest use the utility for longer periods of time. Only 5% of the participants do not make use of Facebook and the other 95% do use it at varying volume levels. This is a good indication of the extent of Facebook use by the significantly larger majority of learners in both grade groups according to years of experience and time spent on Facebook on a daily basis.

The composition of learners in terms of their first languages (L1s) per class is also indicated in the table. Grade 8A consists of 22 Afrikaans L1 learners and 1 English L1 learner. 8F is the most diverse class with 6 Afrikaans L1, 13 English L1 and 9 Xhosa L1. Grade 9 A has only 16 Afrikaans L1 learners, and 9 F has 16 English L1, 3 Xhosa L1 and 1 German L1 students. The language division within the different classes according to the table does not suggest that a specific language group makes use of Facebook more or less than another group. Although 95% of the participants use Facebook, no significant distinction is found between the level of schooling (i.e. the grades), the particular class-group (i.e. 8A or 8F) and language group (i.e. English/Afrikaans/Xhosa) regarding frequency and volume of use.

4.1.2 Places where learners regularly use Facebook

The data represented in figure 1 below represents the places where learners regularly make use of Facebook. The graph indicates that the majority of the learners make use of Facebook either at home (35%) or in the library (27%). Twenty percent of the learners also make use of this utility by means of cellular phones (20%) and the remaining 18% indicated other venues or means of access to Facebook. When learners were asked what “other” referred to in their opinion, it was stated that this option indicated Facebook use at local internet cafes. The figure as a whole illuminates the fact that learners make use of Facebook very evenly over different platforms. Learners were asked to mark all options that apply and the majority of participants indicated making use of more than one platform to access Facebook. No learners marked the option school which would indicate a conscious effort by the school and staff to prevent learners from accessing this type of social utility on school computers when at school or during school times. The chart clearly shows that Facebook is used by the bulk of the participants at different places, which indicates that Facebook is easily accessible.

Chart 1: Places where Facebook is accessed by learners

The aforementioned data indicates that the majority of learners have experience with and spend a substantial amount of time on Facebook. Learners have not only been exposed to Facebook for a number of years, they also make use of the utility on a daily basis. Access to the utility is easily obtainable which allows for high levels of exposure to the informal style of Facebook-speak.

4.1.3 Learners perceptions regarding the effect of Facebook use on their academic performance in History.

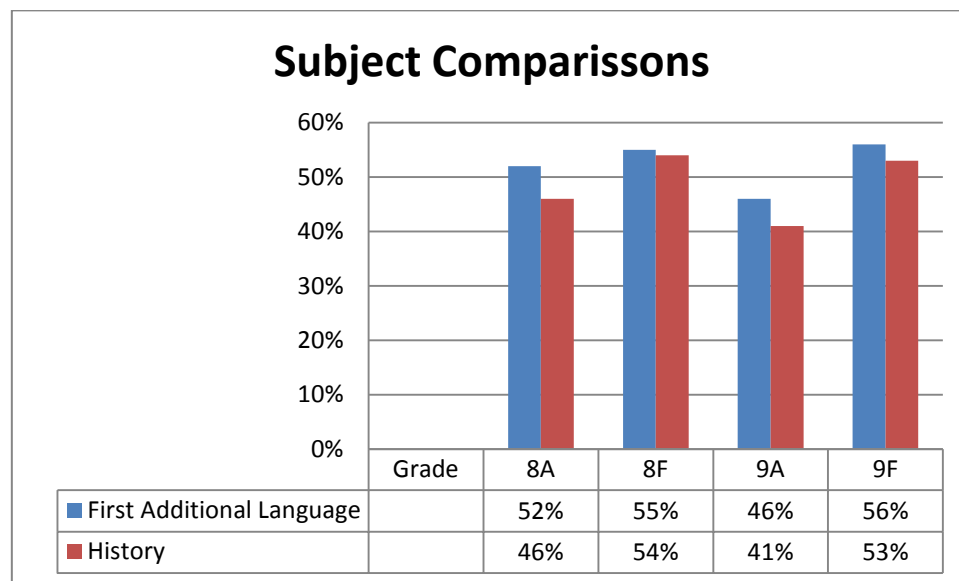
Table 2 (below) displays the learners perceptions regarding the correlation between Facebook use and obtained History marks. Firstly, merely 7% of the participants strongly disagreed with the idea of Facebook impacting their History marks in anyway. As was anticipated, learners did not seem to think that Facebook use would affect their written work in the History classroom: 34% (total number of participants that selected disagree divided by total number of respondents), of the sample group indicated that their academic performance in History was not correlated to their Facebook use. A staggering 41% of the learners elected to neither agree or disagree. This could be due to them not having thought about the possibility

before, or that they merely do not know. Ten percent (10%) of the sample group however strongly agreed with the notion.

Table 2: Do you think that extensive Facebook use has any effect on your obtained History marks?

Class	Grade 8				Grade 9			
	A		F		A		F	
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	5	18%	0	0%	1	8%
Disagree	10	43%	8	29%	5	31%	7	33%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	12	52%	6	21%	7	44%	11	52%
Agree	1	5%	2	7%	3	19%	2	10%
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0	0	0%	0	0%
No Response	0	0%	7	25%	1	6%	0	0%
Totals	23	100%	28	100%	16	100%	21	0%

Whilst Table 2 indicates that the majority of participants either *disagree* or *neither agree nor disagree* on the effect of Facebook on obtained History marks, the acquired academic marks point to the contrary. The academic marks these learners achieved for the First Additional Language and History for the period 10th of April to 22 of June were obtained from the relevant teachers (with due permission and confidentiality agreement). These marks indicate that in each case, the average mark for History (average total of all participants subject marks) is less than the average mark for the First Additional Language (average total of all participants subject marks). Graph 1 compares the average marks between that of the classes' First Additional Language (L2) to that of the History mark. In all cases across the board the First Additional Language mark is higher than the History mark.

Graph 1: Comparison between History and First Additional Language marks

Hypothesis 1 predicted that formal language errors in written work would most likely take place in the context of the History classroom. This is argued due to the theorised emphasis on factual content rather than formal language correctness. The ability to convey correct historical content by learners was theorised to be more significant to teachers than language use, thus not enough emphasis is placed on grammaticality in the History classroom which translates into poorer achievement marks. The recorded data in graph 1 lends support to the fact that the average mark for History is lower than that of the First Additional language. Accordingly one can deduct that the lack of focus on grammaticality in the History classroom results in an inability by learners to effectively convey meaning. As a result, the average History marks are lower than the First Additional Language marks. However, an inability by learners to express meaning could also be attributed to various other variables such as lack of education, lack of focus or even laziness in the classroom. Accordingly, Facebook-speak could perhaps not be the sole reasoning behind learners struggling to convey meaning but could be a contributing factor.

This finding is partly substantiated by comments given by the educators in the teacher questionnaires. Teacher N, when asked “*Do you think grammatical language use is strictly enforced with in the History classroom regarding written work?*” Stated, “I do not think it [grammaticality] is emphasised enough in the junior classes. But with the source questions and the long question in grades 10-12, the learners’ grammar needs to be good otherwise they cannot express themselves.” Teacher N further argued that, “as a result of short/shortened words and meaningless language use as a result of SMS/Facebook etc, learners struggle to write sentences. Paragraphs are an even larger problem. They will write detached words/phrases underneath each other and think it is a paragraph.”

A contributing factor to the finding on hypothesis 1 could also originate out of the teachers approach to written work in the classroom. In the teachers’ questionnaire participants were asked whether or not they make the learners aware of the set language conventions in place for written work. Although the majority of the educators said *yes* (3/5), the other 2 teachers answered *sometimes*. In a small scale investigation these results might be minor; however, if extended over a larger population sample it could become a significant number. The inability by educators to regularly convey set formal language conventions in all subjects could be detrimental to learners ability to convey meaning through written work by not focusing on formal language use.

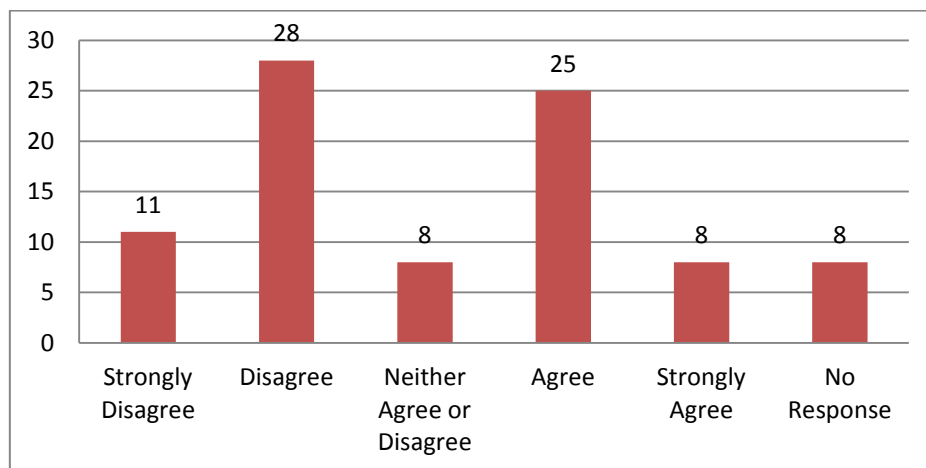
4.1.4 Learners opinions regarding the effect of Facebook on academic written work in the classroom.

The data represented in Graph 2 (below) was extracted from the answers to the question that asked the learners whether they think the way they write on Facebook effects the way they write in their academic work at school. This item was included in the questionnaire to establish perceptions of the learners regarding Facebook use and its effect on academic work. The graph yielded interesting results in that I hypothesised that the majority of learners would

have disagreed with the notion that Facebook impacts their academic work. The finding indicates the contrary: the participants' responses were very even. Twenty eight (28) out of the 88 participants stated that they *disagree*, while 25 out of the 88 stated that they in fact *agreed* with the item in question.

On the more emphatic side of the spectrum, 11 participants stated that they *strongly disagree*, while 8 participants indicated that they *strongly agree*. If *disagree* and *strongly disagree* are categorised together as NO, and *agree* and *strongly agree* are put together as YES, and the options *neither agree nor disagree* and *no response* are disregarded, the results look as follows: No would yield 54% versus a yes of 46%. This indicates that a significant portion of the participating learners are of the opinion that Facebook does have an impact on their way of writing in class work.

Graph 2: Learners opinions regarding the effect of Facebook on academic written work



Statistics such as those found in graph 2 indicate that almost 50% of the learners agree that Facebook affects their written academic work. Learners could therefore be aware of formal language features in their own work. This realisation could point out the severity of the situation when not only educators are witnessing a problem, but the learners themselves are

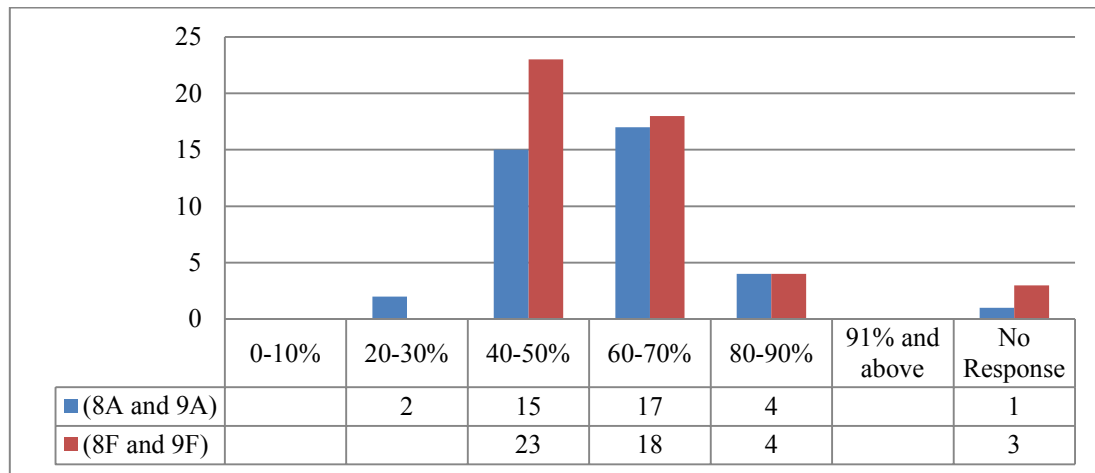
aware of their own limitations in academic writing, i.e. of the negative effects they experience due to Facebook-speak transferral.

Hypothesis 2 (Chapter 1, P3) suggested that the learners' perceptions regarding their own language proficiencies and actual language proficiencies would be skewed. The findings show the contrary, namely that a large portion of participants (46% - undecided participants excluded) agreed with the fact that Facebook does in fact have an impact on their language use in written academic work. Although this finding illustrates that hypothesis 2 is incorrect, it also indicates that the core theory of the research is substantiated namely that the effect of Facebook on learner's academic work is evident – not only to trained language practitioners and teachers, but even to learners themselves.

4.2 Learners language proficiency

The second section of items on the learners questionnaires focuses specifically on language proficiency of the participants. The first question asked them to indicate what their average achievement mark was for their First Additional Languages. This was done to compare the two Afrikaans medium classes with Afrikaans L1 learners (8A and 9A) with the two English medium classes with mixed L1 (E, A and X)learners (8F and 9F). Although the latter two classes are regarded as mixed, they consist of predominantly English L1 learners. The data was tallied to see if any interesting results could be obtained by comparing the performance in L2 (which would generally be English for groups 8A and 9A, and Afrikaans for groups 8F and 9F) of the different groups with one another.

**Graph 3: A comparison between Afrikaans medium and English medium learners
L2 language proficiency**



Graph 3 clearly depicts that the Afrikaans learners of L2 English have lower marks than the English learners of L2 Afrikaans. On both the 40%-50% and the 60%-70% categories the Afrikaans medium classes show poorer academic results than the English medium classes for their additional languages. The Afrikaans medium classes also have students that fall in the 20%-30% mark scale which constitutes a fail.

Teachers comments in the given questionnaire support the findings that have been given in graph 3 in that, Afrikaans learners L1 spelling is poorer in both their home language and their First Additional Language in their written academic work than that of the English L1 participants. Teacher N specifically states, “Spelling is naturally an even bigger problem, especially in Afrikaans because they usually SMS and Facebook in mixed English.”

Graph 1 represented the actual marks (as opposed to the reported performance) of learners for all classes from both their First Additional Languages and History. This graph lends weight to the argument in that the Afrikaans medium classes (L1) did worse than the English medium classes (L1) in their First Additional Language L2 and History marks on all fronts. In combining both the First Additional Language and History marks, the average mark of the

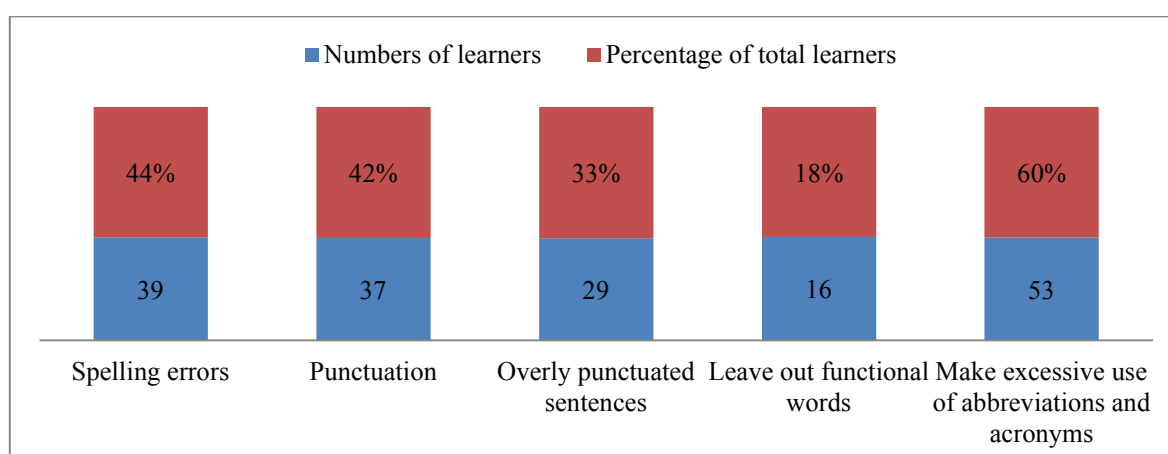
Afrikaans medium classes, grades 8A and 9A was 47%. The English medium classes of (8F and 9F) however on average both scored marks of 55%. Thus it seems that the English medium classes score 8% higher on average than that of the Afrikaans classes in both subjects.

Hypothesis 3 (Chapter 1, P3) predicted that the extent of Facebook-speak transferral would be present more in the written academic work of the Afrikaans medium learners than that of English medium learners. Graph 3 substantiates this argument in that the Afrikaans medium learners on an individual level claimed that they score less than the English medium learners in their First Additional Language marks, thus L2 marks. It is however also true that the Afrikaans medium learners on average gain poorer marks in their History class work than the English medium learners do. Accordingly, the English learners score 8% higher marks in a combined score of both subjects, which is a significant margin. Graphs 1 and 3, as well as the teachers comments, substantiate the hypothesis that the writing skills of the Afrikaans medium learners are affected more by Facebook-speak than their English medium counterparts. The fact that they perform below par in both the History and the language classes can be attributed, at least in part, to formal language errors widely used and allowed on Facebook. The impression here is that the Facebook writing style and register result in an impaired ability to convey meaning effectively in written academic work. This was tested in the written exercises completed by the learners and will be illustrated accordingly in the following section. Facebook-speak can however not be argued to be the sole reason for poor marks, these findings would have to be dealt with much more carefully to assess the capacity of this SNS's influence. Further studies would have to be done to take combinations of various variables into consideration to establish more accurate results. The parameters of this study did however not allow for such a complex exercise.

4.2.1 Language features associated with Facebook-speak as used by learners.

Specific language features associated with Facebook-speak were hypothesised to be present in learners L2 written work. The particular writing fundamentals sought out for attention in this study, were spelling errors, punctuation, over-punctuation, lack of functional words and the excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms. The participants were asked to self-report on the kinds of language features they made use of whilst on Facebook that are typically associated with Facebook-language. Participants were asked to mark all the features that apply to them during Facebook use, thus more than one feature were selected by the majority of the learners.

Graph 4: Self-reported features of Facebook-speak in learners work



Graph 4 represents the collected data regarding the self-reported features. As can be seen, the numbers are rather high. The highest feature is that of excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms at 60%. Spelling errors are the second highest reported features at 44% and punctuation is at 42%. The lowest reported features are over-punctuation at 33% and the leaving out of functional words at 18%. All the terms included in the questionnaires were explained to the learners with accompanying examples before the exercise started to clear up any confusion in the item.

Facebook-speak stems from a technological environment where the speed of communication is a vital feature. Most technological utilities are created to effectively hasten communication. This type of language use emphasises shortened words, lack of punctuation and purposefully making spelling errors to shorten the number of spaces used. The use of these characteristics are evidently featured in learners' own Facebook interactions, as graph 4 establishes.

The transferral from Facebook-speak to academic work, as has been hypothesised, can be supported by the data accumulated from the teacher's questionnaires. This study contributes to reflection on the effect that the language of new media has on traditional academic literacies. One of the items which substantiate the argument that there is a significant and measurable effect is articulated in the question that asks, "*Have you witnessed any grammatical errors in written work that could be attributed to Facebook-speak?*" Two out of the five educator participants answered *agree* and the remaining three answered *strongly agree*. When asked to specify, the teachers were given a space to identify more precisely the kinds of errors found in learners' work. Teachers N stipulate that, "learners' language use is so poor that they cannot express themselves. The use of the wrong verb often changes the meaning of a fact." Educator M stated, "Students shorten words and sentences. They don't start sentences with capitals and forget about punctuation." Teacher D wrote that, "spelling and the answering of answers in short as possible way with incorrect spelling." Finally teacher P stated, "learners like to use abbreviations for certain words that are commonly used with electronic media such as 'u' or 'lol'."

All the participant educators not only unanimously agreed that Facebook-speak language attributes could be found in the written work of the learners but all of them had been able to identify exact elements. The non-formal language features that I wanted to identify in the learners' written exercises which could possibly be attributed to Facebook-speak are for e.g. punctuation errors, the lack of Capital letters at the beginning of sentences or in people and

places names (e.g. dear peter). Over punctuation, explained to the participants, was regarded as the excessive use of punctuation such as exclamation marks or question marks (e.g. cool!!! Or how are you???). Functional words were explained as the words commonly omitted to shorten sentences (e.g. the/an). The last sought after non-formal language feature looked for was the possible use of abbreviations and acronyms such as “ROFL” (for rolling on the floor laughing), “LOL” (for laughing out loud) or “LTM” (for listening to music).

4.2.2 Teacher’s opinions regarding new literacies such as Facebook.

Question four on the teacher’s questionnaires asked “*do you think the incorporation of Facebook-speak, if any, has a negative effect on written work?*” Three out of the five participants stated they *agree* and two selected *strongly agree*. This evidence supports the hypothesis that Facebook has an effect on the learners work and that this observed effect is a negative one.

The final item posed on the teachers questionnaires asked whether they thought that new literacies associated with electronic media (e.g. Facebook-speak, SMS-speak) should be integrated into the written academic work at schools. Four out of the five participants selected *strongly disagree* and the other chose *disagree*. The answer to the final item indicates that language aspects associated with Facebook have the tendency to be negative as was indicated by the data from these particular teachers, as being negative. The observed language features that have been highlighted are all regarded to be contrary to the required formal language as is prescribed by schools. The educators do not foresee any positives regarding these Facebook features in relation to written academic work at secondary school level. The responses from the teachers clearly and emphatically suggest that not only are features of Facebook-speak being transferred to learners written academic work but that it is a negative occurrence.

The data obtained from the teacher questionnaires reinforces hypothesis 4 (Chapter 1, P3) which argues that specific features of Facebook-speak would be found in (L2) learners' written academic work.

The opinions of the teachers however being of importance are not necessarily accurate or final. Facebook as a utility for CMC will undoubtedly remain very popular to the learners. Facebook is a social medium that is bound to stay part of the lives of the participants for possibly the remainder of their life. Rather than disregard Facebook as a negative CMC, educators could perhaps think of means of incorporating the utility into academic spheres. Facebook language could be regarded as a type of genre containing its own functions within the language syllabus of a school. Facebook text could be an additional, independent new literacy to be studied with the existing types of formal written texts found in the language syllabi. As with all texts the benefits and negatives of specific aspects could be addressed by teachers in the classroom and it could be emphasised how different contexts require different forms of text. Using Facebook is regarded as a means of developing and creating ones identity in a social context and to ostracise the utility could ultimately be detrimental to learners. Instead an effective incorporation of certain aspects of Facebook-speak could yield very positive results in preparing learners for the real world regarding versatile language use, social development and improved critical thinking.

Features of Facebook that are not acceptable in formal language education are the shortened spelling, lack of punctuation, nonconventional punctuation, the lack of functional words and the excessive use of acronyms and abbreviations etc. However positives can be taken from the SNS. The non linear presentation of text on the Internet allows the user to deviate and alter the reading strategies of text. This format allows for individual "cognitive processing style" in developing or obtaining information and communicating this knowledge accordingly (Westlake, 2008: 25). This process could be focused and integrated into the language

classroom to develop learners text analysis skills. It could help improve learners summarisation skills that allow for pertinent information to be extracted from different sources to obtain the most correct definition of concepts for example.

Facebook has already been used as new literary practice in previous studies. Julia Davies (2011) studied the Facebook practices of UK students to discover whether these practices could provide opportunities for new literary practices through text-making. Stacey M. Kitsis (2008) also had learners do written work using Facebook as the platform. The exercises were discussed between learners via Facebook to obtain clarity about specific topics and then marked one another's work. This was done to generate a pride in ownership of work but more importantly created a platform for critical thinking and writing to take place.

It seems it would perhaps be more beneficial to all involved to instead think of ways to effectively integrate this new form of text than shun it as a negative habit that needs to be hidden.

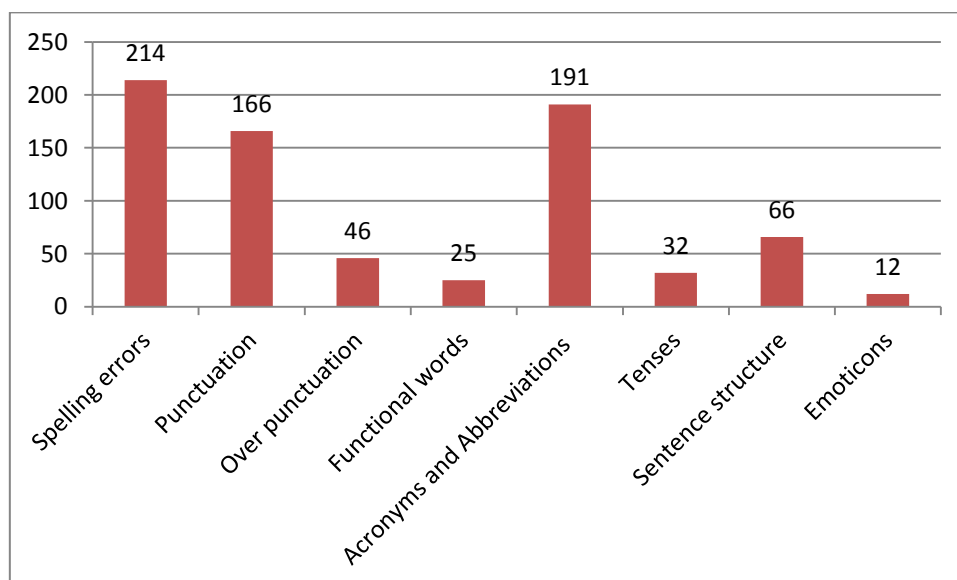
4.3 Examination and discussion regarding learners' written exercise.

Graph 5 (below) is a representation of the frequency of specific non-standard forms of English used by learners during the written exercises. The graph represents the total number of errors found in the work of all the participants according to the predetermined language features argued to be associated with Facebook-speak. The exercise given to the participants required learners to write a letter to a friend of no more than 50 words relaying the experience they had at the recent Olympic Games. All the exercise where individually tallied and the amount of non-formal language features found for each category (e.g. spelling, punctuation) were added up. These numbers were then added to determine the amount of non-formal language instances recorded per grade, class and language medium.

In addition to the features specifically expected, the written samples also contained three unforeseen, non-standard forms of English namely non standard use of tenses, sentence structures and emoticons. The inclusion of the added features was surprising in that participants were specifically instructed to complete the exercises as though they were writing in their academic workbooks for school purposes. This is a further indication that learners are blurring the lines between formal and informal language use even in the context of the classroom. The difference between specific genres with different functions is that they require different text forms and should have been taught to learners in language classrooms.

Such blurring of different categories of text can be associated with over-exposure to Facebook use. However, other possibilities of why such lack of clarity on the requirements of formal written work, also have to be considered. For example, learners who have grown up with much visual stimulation, and exposure to multimodality as in TV programmes, who have had limited experience with printed story books, will not intuitively have gained a sense of what written texts require. Whatever the causes of genre-insensitivity, the data of this study indicates that Facebook-speak features are definitely prevalent in the participant's academic written work and accordingly support hypothesis 4.

The most frequent feature found in the work of the participants was that of incorrect spelling. Each nonconventional form of spelling in a singular exercise was counted and later added to obtain a sum total per category. All misspelled words were counted even if the same word had made more than one appearance in a piece of written text. Statistically, a spelling error count of 214 creates an average of 2,4 miss-spelled words per learner sample of 50 words. With a word count of no more than 50 words allowed per sample most learners adhered to the set word count criteria however, very few formatted their exercise in the form of a letter as was instructed. Acronyms and abbreviations errors at 191 and punctuation errors at 166 coincide with the most frequently identified mistakes by teachers in learners written work.

Graph 5: Non-formal language features identified in the written exercises of all participants.

The most frequently identified acronyms were G2G for (got to go) and LOL for (laughing out loud). Abbreviations often seen were ‘thanx’ for (thanks), ‘u’ for (you), ‘2’ for (to) and ‘whn’ for (when). The low word count allowed in this exercise was specifically implemented to force learners to revert to words they were familiar with to determine if many non-formal language features would be witnessed.

Both these aforementioned features stem out of a need to shorten words and sentences to communicate as quickly and efficiently (also with least possible cost as characters may (in SMS) take you into a second message) as possible. Facebook writing focuses on quick, simplified wording use that expels a need for punctuation almost completely and requires the use of abbreviations and acronyms to shorten the communication process. This is also because the character window on Facebook is small and long messages are thus not fully displayed.

These features stem out of a need to communicate in a timely manner to convey messages as directly and sufficiently as possible. Accordingly, the highest non-formal language features as represented in the graph can be associated with Facebook-speak.

Examples of the written work produced by the participants emphasise the combined use of non-formal language features as were categorised to be identified in the exercises. One sample read, “It was nice mhan!! But my legs R in pain!!”. An exert that identified many non-formal language aspects stated, “My parents r gone 4 da weekd8ys! :) R u cming 2 clebra8. All my galz cme 2 my party. Brb c u all tonight!!:). These exert having been written after participants were clearly instructed to write in formal English. The exercises might have misinterpreted by learners as to what was required of them. A learner that did in fact follow the set guidelines of structuring the response as a letter also exhibited non-formal features, “...2 tell u all about the Olympic game I attended. I watched swimen nd gymnastics. Nd I ws there whn Chad le Clos swim 2 victory”. The majority of exercises contained more than one category of non-formal language use as was previously identified by myself.

One of the previously unidentified features found in the sample work was that of non-formal sentence structure which is fourth highest in terms of frequency, according to the data I collected, and as indicated on the graph. The possible effects of sentence structure here refer to word orders that are a-typical: words and phrases are ordered in a manner that is either ungrammatical, or does not convey the meaning conventionally associated with such a structure. Thus the meaning of the sentence is either altered, or the sentence becomes incomprehensible. An example of unintelligible sentence structure is taken from one of the participants from grade 8 A. His/her response to the exercise (Chapter 3, p 21) read as follows:

“I attended the Olympic game with the rest off may class during may test I was little bit of shock wen mnHoonenberg did cme in cause I thought wht did we do again? OMW but any way skta I did enjoy it bt you must and cme do the game as well! Cause you love to fb I know you and spend more then 5hours on fb.”

The variety of unconventional forms in this piece of written work are evident, so much so that it becomes difficult to decode at all. This is not an isolated example – quite a number of the learners’ responses contained such language errors. Besides all the spelling errors,

nonconventional punctuation and excessive use of acronyms and abbreviations, the sentence structure perplexes the reader. It is not clear what is trying to be communicated. On a propositional level the written piece demonstrates incoherent cognitive shifts from one idea to another. This type of writing is largely associated with the multimodal approach of Facebook. In Davies (2012: 21) Luke argues that, “texts of the new technologies have mutated into complex hybrid systems that have made new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange, and communication. These digitally multimodal textual practices have attracted a great deal of attention. Facebook is no exception to this multimodal trend enabling users to easily embed content from other sites, and combine written text with other modalities.”

This thought shift by means of extracting information from numerous sites and articulating them in ungrammatical sentence structure, can hamper the reader’s interpretation. Learners of such a young age, it can be argued, have not yet developed the intellectual capacity to arrange their thoughts in a more conventionally structured manner. Then the features of Facebook as a social network encourage a condensed style which appears to be unhelpful in developing well-structured ways of putting thought into language. The participant sample above illustrates the difficulty this participant has to arrange his/her thoughts in a way that is clear and unambiguous. This could be attributed to Facebook-speak; it could also illustrate the limitations of Facebook in developing language skills, writing skills and communicative skills.

Over-punctuation in the learner responses is illustrated by the following: This unconventional use of punctuation marks such as “How are you???,” or “I can’t wait to see you!!!”, is associated with both Facebook and SMS-speak. Similarly, functional words were left out as in: “It was fun at [the] games” and “6 medals [and] it takes place in London”. These examples occurred frequently enough to dismiss the notion that learners merely forgot to enter functional words on occasion.

Example (5) illustrates the unconventional (if not ungrammatical) way in which tenses occur: “All the games they doing is boring” and “Bolt is fast than every one in the Earth”. Examples of unconventional use of tenses were identified enough times to include it in the study as another non-formal language feature which could possibly be attributed to Facebook-speak.

Finally, emoticons very rarely, if ever, used in written academic work, were used as if they are regular and transparent parts of such a genre, as in (6), “it really was extremely fun! Mwah :) and “c ya ;) :) ;)”.

Table 3 (below) represents the number of individual samples containing non-standard language features per class. The data indicates that the Afrikaans medium participants use considerably more informal language features than the English medium group does. Although this table shows less differences between the two sets of classes, it also shows the fact that per head the Afrikaans medium learners make more deviations from the written standard in their written academic work.

Table 3 also indicates that the Afrikaans medium learners, even when their individual use of non-formal language features are not significantly more than those of individuals in the English medium group, make so many more language errors per exercise. Non-formal language features regarding spelling and punctuation are similarly distributed in the two language medium groups, as is indicated in table 3; however, the other language features that have been investigated here are less evident in the English medium group’s work than in that of than the Afrikaans medium group.

An explanation for the difference in the data of the two groups cannot be attributed to the English format of the exercise. The few learners who preferred to write in Afrikaans did so and the results remained the same. The Afrikaans samples still contained more informal

language features as were identified in graph 5 associated with Facebook, than those that occurred in the work of learners in the English medium classes as is contained in this example: “Kani glo ex kla mti dng nie :) Daar was so bja dinge om te doen en nouwsek so ma leka moegies!!!”. This sample also contains many abbreviations, over punctuation and even an emoticon in a sample of formal work from one of the Afrikaans medium participants. The same categories of non-formal language features were prevalent in the exercise. Accordingly, some of these features are even present in certain Afrikaans learners L1 language.

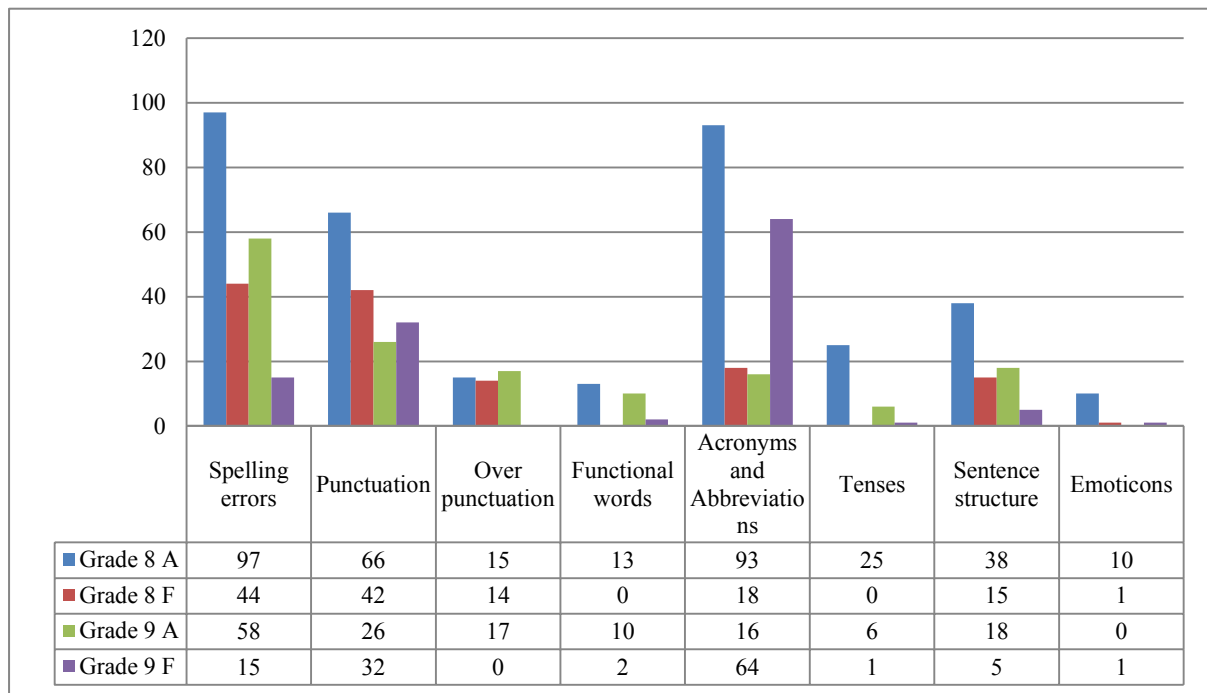
Table 3: Representation of non-formal language features per participant sample

Number of samples containing the specific error	Spelling	Punctuation	Over punctuation	Functional words Acronyms and abbreviations	Tenses	Sentence structure	Emoticons	
Grade 8 A (23)	23	17	8	8	18	14	19	3
Grade 8 F (28)	22	23	6	0	3	0	13	1
Grade 9 A (16)	14	12	5	4	8	5	10	0
Grade 9 F (21)	9	15	0	2	3	1	5	1

The conclusion to be drawn here once again concurs with the hypothesis (Chapter 1, P3) that Afrikaans medium learners are influenced more by Facebook-speak in their written academic work than their English medium counterparts. It can be argued that Afrikaans medium learners are more susceptible to the influence of English texts in that they are overly exposed to popular English media via television, English books, radio and Internet. Facebook being one of the new forms of digital text that learners use on a daily basis could influence their written work. The abating Afrikaans media could also be considered to be influential in the formal written language of learners.

Graph 6 (below) indicates the identified non-standard language features found in the samples of written work divided by the participant classes. The graph indicates a larger number of language errors from both the 8A and 9A classes than that of the 8F and 9F classes. The 8A and 9A classes are the Afrikaans medium classes and the remaining two classes are the English medium classes. When asked, the deputy principal stated that the English medium classes' learners are regarded as being somewhat proficient in both Afrikaans and English but is still predominantly English. Although the exercise was done in English, four participants completed the exercise in Afrikaans. The unbalanced results cannot only be attributed to home language specifications. The 8A class had a total of 357 non-formal language features and the 9A class had 151 non-formal language features as opposed to 8F's 135 and 9F's 120. The combined number of non-formal language features by the Afrikaans medium classes in total yielded 508 features to that of 255 by the English medium classes.

To argue that the features are primarily because of home language characteristics would not correlate with the following data comparison. In drawing a parallel between that of 8A and 8F the following comes to light. 8A consists of 22 Afrikaans learners and 1 English learner and their word totalled 357 non-formal language features. 8F consists of 6 Afrikaans, 13 English and 9 Xhosa learners and totalled 135 non-formal language features in the same terms. 8F presented less than half the number of non-formal language features compared to 8A, even though their class composition is considerably more diverse with regards to home language. The accumulated data once again emphasises that the Afrikaans medium learners written work is affected more than the learners from English medium backgrounds.

Graph 6: Features of Facebook-speak found in written exercises per class

The combined average amount of non-formal language features found in the Afrikaans medium classes' written work accumulated to 13 non-formal language features per participant versus that of 5 per participant in the English medium classes. In an exercise which allowed the composition for a text of no more than 50 words, both averages seem high; however the occurrence of unconventional forms in the work of learners in the Afrikaans medium classes are almost 3 times higher than those in the English medium classes.

The spelling errors for example beleve (for believe), diferent (for different) and sumting (for something) are significantly higher in both Afrikaans medium classes compared to that of the English medium classes. Punctuation inconsistencies including cant' (for can't), is'nt (for isn't) and its (for its') amount to 92 across the two Afrikaans medium classes, as compared to 74 across the two English medium classes. Over-punctuation instances for example hey you!!! (for hey you!) or how are you??? (for how are you?), (totalled at 32 across the two Afrikaans medium classes, compared to that of 14 across the English medium classes.

There were 32 instances in all of omission of functional words such as, “hey there hope it’s still” (for hey there [I] hope) or won 6 medals Olympics (for won 6 medals [at the] Olympics) across the Afrikaans medium groups, against 2 such instances across the English medium groups. Groups 8A and 9A made use of acronyms and unconventional abbreviations such as LOL (for laugh out loud) and Gr8 (for great) in 109 instances, as opposed to 82 such forms in groups 8F and 9F.

There were 31 instances of unusual tense forms like, but Usan Bolt are the fastest (for but Usain Bolt is the fastest), across the Afrikaans medium classes, compared to only 1 such instance across the English medium classes.

There were 56 features of incorrect sentence structure for instance, all the people who were on the Olympic games (for all the people who were at the Olympic Games), in the Afrikaans medium classes, against 20 such inconsistencies across the English medium classes. Finally, a feature that is not acceptable in formal work at all, but that occurred here quite regularly, was the inclusion of emoticons in the learners’ exercises. The Afrikaans participants work exhibited 10 such instances, versus 1 in the work of the English medium participants.

In summary, the participants from the Afrikaans medium groups presented written exercises which contained many more non-formal language features than were found in the work of the English medium classes. This occurrence was evident in all 5 categories originally selected for attention, as well as in the additional 3 categories that became evident in the data. The data collected in these four classes thus indicate that the written work of Afrikaans medium learners exhibit substantially more Facebook-speak language features than the written work of the English medium groups. This supports hypothesis 3 that transferral from this medium to written academic work will be more evident in the work of Afrikaans L1 learners working through their L2 English, than in the work of English medium learners working through their L2.

Chapter Five

Findings and Conclusion

5.1 Summary of what the data showed

This investigation indicated that the (L2) high school learners of grades 8 and 9 in the sample school are frequent users of the social network site (SNS) Facebook. The participants not only frequent the site but the majority of the learners have been exposed to Facebook for a minimum of one year whereas the remaining 51% have been using the site between 2-6 years. The diversity within the language groups of the participants' shows equal Facebook use by all participants, regardless of their language biographies, which suggests that socio-economical and racial elements do not significantly factor into Facebook accessibility.

Facebook was also shown to be readily accessible over a range of different platforms. The interesting result regarding this data was that the school did not allow for any Facebook usage during school times and on school computers this was diligently adhered to. This could arguably be due to educators wanting learners to be productive regarding school work or, as was represented by teachers' comments, that Facebook language has made a visible negative impact on learner's written academic work. Overall no teacher was sensitive to the possible useful effects of new technologies and of the educational rewards likely to stem from recognising the central role of social media in the life of teenagers in the 21st century.

The learner participants of the study were not of the opinion that Facebook use significantly or negatively impacted their academic work in the history classroom. The majority of participants were in fact ambivalent regarding this item in the questionnaire, and the majority selected *neither agree nor disagree*. The comparison between the opinions and the actual

academic marks pointed to the contrary. The First Additional Language marks were higher than the History marks in every participant class. The recorded data indicates that the History classroom could be less orientated on grammaticality and focus more on factual content. The learners lack of skills in formal language use could contribute to an inability to convey meaning accurately, which is supported by the comments obtained in the teacher's questionnaires regarding learners' language use. Also the inability of educators to periodically communicate the set language requirements and the policies in place, could lead to a more lackadaisical environment which would diminish formal language focus in the History classroom.

Data that yielded interesting results were the learners opinions regarding the effect of Facebook use on their written academic work. According to what the study hypothesised participants were expected to reject the notion that Facebook has an impact on their written work. The evidence is to the contrary: almost half of the learners had the impression that this social utility does make an impact on their work. The realisation of this fact not only by teachers, but by learners as well, is significant in that it emphasises the strong awareness of how new technologies and social media may affect their work, to the point that they themselves are witnessing its presence. Although hypothesis 2 (Chapter 1, P3) might have been rejected by this data it does however contribute to confirming the primary claim of the study that Facebook-speak ultimately has an influence on the learners' written work.

A very interesting finding in the study was the fact that the Afrikaans L1 learners produced weaker academic results in their First Additional Language (English as L2) and History than the English L1 learners did in their equivalent subjects. Across the board the Afrikaans medium learners' academic results were lower than the English medium participants. One of the educators argued that the reason for this phenomenon could be found in the mixed language forms used on social applications such as SMS and Facebook. The explanation for

the fact that the Afrikaans L1-medium learners do poorer not only in the language subject but in history as well, raises some concern. This occurrence can be contributed to the language features established as typical on Facebook, which coincide with an inability to convey meaning effectively in written academic work. This indicates limited exposure to more standardised forms of Afrikaans as it is used in other genres, and extensive exposure to a form that integrates mixed, informal and non-standard forms.

Self-reported features of Facebook by the learners emphasised that informal language was used overwhelmingly during visits to this SNS; importantly, this was recognised and acknowledged by the participants of the study. The teachers were of the opinion that new literacies such as Facebook should by no means be incorporated into the school syllabus. Their view is one that dismisses Facebook-speak as an unacceptable linguistic practice, and not as one that could perhaps be used creatively within a given social context. The educators may not be sufficiently prepared to incorporate a new way of writing. The reasoning behind their unanimous opinion is most likely one that condemns the transfer of the negative features of new literacies to language use in other contexts and genres, as has already been observed by the educators.

The learners' written exercises accounted for the majority of data that substantiated the hypothesis that Facebook-speak/SMS-speak impacts on the written academic work of second language learners at school. Firstly, the exercise was structured so that learners had to write a letter to a friend giving them news of the Olympic Games which they are imagined to have attended. Out of the 88 participants that completed the exercise only 13 formatted their responses into a conventional letter. Therefore 88% of the learners would have failed the exercise, had it been an official school test. Writing a letter is a part of the official school syllabus so learners should have been familiar with the required format. The prevalence of non-formal language features in the written exercise was excessive for grade 8 and 9 learners.

Three non-formal language features not anticipated as possible social-media-related influences, were also identified in the exercises, namely ungrammatical use of tenses, unconventional sentence structures and emoticons.

The Afrikaans L1 learners received weaker scores for the written exercise given in data-collection - which coincides with the actual academic achievement marks obtained from the school. Per head, the Afrikaans medium learners made slightly more mistakes, but the number of mistakes in the exercises themselves was substantially more than was the case for the English medium students. The fact that the exercise was set in English did not perturb the Afrikaans learners in any remarkable way. They were allowed to write in Afrikaans if they so desired. The Afrikaans pieces of written work had equal numbers of “mistakes” if not more so compared to the other exercises. This data reinforces the idea that the work of Afrikaans L1 learners is more influenced by new literacies than their English counterparts.

The overall non-formal language features identified in the exercise per class, once again established the fact that the Afrikaans L1 learners did work that deserved lower grades compared to the English L1 learners (i.e. the English medium learners – which includes a number of Afrikaans L1 and Xhosa L1 learners). The statistics show that the average English medium learner used 5 non-formal language features against 13 by the Afrikaans medium learners in the exercises. These non-formal language features attributed to Facebook-speak for the purposes of this study, are evidently used much more in the work of Afrikaans Medium learners’ written work.

5.2 Interpretation

Understanding regarding multimodalities, new literacies and digital literacy in an L2 context (thus in English L2 for Afrikaans-medium learners, and Afrikaans L2 for English-medium learners) needs to be incorporated systematically. In order for an education system to adapt to

the evolution of language and literacy education so as not to be left behind, requires knowledge on the matter and open mindedness for possible alterations in teaching methods. As stated by Lotherington and Jenson (2011:228), reducing L2 literacies to the “flat literacies of paper-based resources in the classroom raises questions of authenticity in L2 learning. If teachers are to meaningfully engage L2 learners in communication as it exists in the social world, these brave new dimensions of literacy must be woven into classroom learning”. The assumptions regarding elements of communication such as format, language form, the learners and text types need to be re-examined and adjusted accordingly.

Theoretically, adjustments to an ingrained structure are conceivable, however the actual successful implementation of new ideas and practices are costly and time consuming. What would be required for effective L2 education which incorporates new forms of language use, is, “appropriate teacher education, assessment practices, the pedagogical space to experiment with multimodality, and respect for the varying (multiple) language competencies of all members of a learning context, no matter how configured, are critical directions for creating the conditions for successful multimodal L2 teaching” (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011: 241).

The tangible implementation of an overhauled method of educating is as yet not a realistic idea in a South African context. Multimodal vistas regarding new digital literacies are innovative and young, even in educational systems elsewhere. Realistic, effective ways of incorporation into educational structures need to be conceptualised in a thorough and integrative way. Until tried and tested methods have been achieved, as will be required in the near future, the notion is still on the backburner in South African schools.

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Appendix A

Learners Questionnaire

Name.....

Grade.....

What is your home language?.....

Do you have access to Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ no

Approximately how many years of experience do you have using Facebook?

- ☐ 0 - 1 years
- ☐ 2 - 3 years
- ☐ 4 - 5 years
- ☐ 6 or more years

How much time do you spend on FACEBOOK during a normal weekday (Monday- Friday)?

- ☐ 0-30 min
- ☐ 30 min-1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ 4-5 hours
- ☐ More than 10 hours a day

Please indicate the places where you regularly use Facebook. (Mark all that apply)

- ☐ Library
- ☐ Home
- ☐ School
- ☐ Cellular Phone
- ☐ Other:

Do you think that extensive Facebook use has any effect on your obtained History marks?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Do you use a different form of language when writing on Facebook than when you are writing at school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Do you think that the way you write on Facebook effects the way you write during academic work in the classroom?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Learners Language Proficiency Questionnaire

What achievement mark do you obtain at school for your First Additional Language on average?

- ☐ 0-10%
- ☐ 20-30%
- ☐ 40-50%
- ☐ 60-70%
- ☐ 80-90%
- ☐ 91% and above

Are your History teachers strict about language mistakes in your written work?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Do you concentrate on the language you use when doing written work in the History classroom?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Which of the following do you use when writing on Facebook/ (mark all that apply):

- ☐ Do not worry about spelling (make spelling errors)
- ☐ Do not worry about punctuation (Leave out commas and full stops)
- ☐ Overly punctuate sentences (use lots of exclamation marks)
- ☐ Leave out functional words (leave words like **the/an** out of sentences)
- ☐ Make excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. “ROFL” for “rolling on the floor laughing”)

Survey confidentiality By participating in the survey you will remain completely anonymous and you maintain the right to withdraw from the survey at any point in time without incurring any repercussions whatsoever.

Appendix B

Teachers' Questionnaire

Name.....

What grade/s do you teach? (Also specify class e.g. grade 9 D).....

What subjects do you teach?.....

How many learners do you teach in total?.....

Do you make the children aware of the set language policies in place for written academic work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Do you think correct grammatical language use is strictly enforced with in the history classroom regarding written work?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Have you witnessed any grammatical errors in written work that could be attributed to Facebook-speak?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If so what specifically?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Do you think the incorporation of Facebook-speak, if any, has a negative effect on written work?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Do you think the incorporation of Facebook-speak, if any, has a positive effect on written work?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Do you think that new literacies associated with electronic media (e.g. Facebook-speak, SMS-speak) should be reflected or integrated into written academic work at schools?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐

Survey confidentiality

By participating in the survey you will remain completely anonymous and you maintain the right to withdraw from the survey at any point in time without incurring any repercussions whatsoever.

**Appendix C - 1a: Sample of written work of an Afrikaans medium
grade 8 participant**

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her
about the Olympic games that you attended.

It was nice mhan!! But my legs R in pain!! Kani
glo ex'kla' mti' dng nie b' Daar was so bja'
dng om te doen en nouwrek' soma' leka'
moegies!!! I was soooo excited!! Koni'
wag om we' hyr' 2' te komi' Well' Gag'
c'ya ☺ ☺ ☺

**Appendix C - 1b: Sample of written work of an Afrikaans medium
grade 8 participant**

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her
about the Olympic games that you attended.

Hello Remy, I attended the Olympic game
with the rest of my class during my
test. I was little bit of shock when
mnr. Heeneberg did come in, cause I thought
what did we do again? omw but any way
skta I did enjoy it bt you must and
come do the game as well! cause you
love to FB. I know you and
spend more then hours on FB.

Appendix C - 1c: Sample of written work of an Afrikaans medium grade 8 participant

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her about the Olympic games that you attended.

Hi u' how are u'. I was at the
olympic games and it was so cool.
like to c' chad le clos. It was
tha' best thing ever. I wish u'
were with me than it would if
been so much fun. I can believe
that we have 6 medal. ~~the~~ Oscar
was so fast u' wouldn't believe
he would run a cheetha away.
Maybe next time me nd' u' can
go 2 geta to tha' olympic games.
2 geta. I can believe it.

**Appendix C - 2a: Sample of written work of an English medium
grade 8 participant**

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her about the Olympic games that you attended.

I attended the Olympic Games in this year 2012.
It was gradually held in London (UK) Stratford.
It was a very pleasant experience because I to swim with
two famous swimmers called Chad Le Clos and Cameron van
der Burgh. It was also an interesting opportunity for me
to connect to foreigners & like people from all over the
world.

Appendix C - 3a: Sample of written work of an Afrikaans medium grade 9 participant

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her about the Olympic games that you attended.

Hey Andy
Hierdie naweek is die Olympic wedstryde ek
wil hê of hoor dat jy nie wil oor kom
nie dan kan ons dit mos saam kyk
en jy kan nog vriende saam
bring dan kan ons braai ook
Laat weet my so gau as moontlik
xoxoxox
From: Gino

**Appendix C - 4a: Sample of written work of an English medium
grade 9 participant**

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her
about the Olympic games that you attended.

Hi Minnie
? De Olympics wer fun (S.A) got a few mdals?
t w3 so xtein 2 b der i gt 2 c Usain Bolt
Nd sum famos stars, hoo wer wachin de
gymes t w3 so fun hope w wet der coz
u wolve luv de xshn happenin der M
so proud ol ovr boy Chad 4 getin Gold
in swimmin 4 us. Wish u cym with
MAHUGS ♥
IDE (Wandisa)

Appendix C - 4b: Sample of written work of an English medium grade 9 participant

In no more than 50 words write a letter to your friend telling him/her about the Olympic games that you attended.

..... 52 Rocklands Street
..... Westcliff
..... Hermanus
..... 7200
..... 25 ~~15~~ September 2012
.....
Dear Storm
.....
I just want to inform you about the wonderful time
that I had at the London Olympics games 2012. The atmosphere
there was the best
.....
I was supporting team South Africa all the way
blowing yuzela's like I never did. I was so proud of
them and of Usain Bolt.
.....
Yours sincerely
Soso.